

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that can cause serious liver disease.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is usually spread from getting particles of fecal material (poop) into your mouth that are too small to be seen. This can happen through household or sexual contact with an infected person or by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated with the hepatitis A virus. Casual contact, such as in a school or work setting, has not been known to spread hepatitis A virus.

What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis A infection?

Infected people can have no symptoms at all or be extremely ill. Only 30% of children less than six years of age develop symptoms, while 70% of older children and adults develop symptoms. Symptoms might include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine, or jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin). Even without symptoms, people infected with hepatitis A virus can spread the infection to others.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear anywhere from two to six weeks after exposure. Symptoms usually develop over a period of several days, and usually last less than two months, although some people can be ill for as long as six months.

Who is most at risk?

Although anyone can get hepatitis A, in the United States, certain groups of people are at higher risk, such as those who:

- Travel to or live in countries where hepatitis A is common
- Are family members or caregivers of a recent adoptee from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Live with someone who has hepatitis A.
- Are men who have sexual contact with other men
- Use illegal drugs, whether injected or not
- Have clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Have sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A.

What type of health problems are caused by hepatitis A infection?

Most people who get hepatitis A feel sick for several months, but they usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage. Sometimes hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death, although this is rare and occurs more commonly in people older than 50 and people with other liver diseases.

How is hepatitis A infection diagnosed?

A healthcare provider can determine if a person has hepatitis A by discussing his or her symptoms and taking a blood sample.

How is hepatitis A infection treated?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Bed rest is generally all that is needed. Infected

people should also avoid alcohol, drugs, or medicines without checking with a doctor.

How can hepatitis A infection be prevented?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A infection is by getting vaccinated. The vaccine is recommended for all children and people with certain risk factors and medical conditions. The vaccine is also recommended for travelers to certain international countries, even if travel occurs for short times or on closed resorts. The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and given as two shots, six months apart. Both shots are needed for long-term protection.

The spread of hepatitis A can also be prevented by always washing hands thoroughly after using the toilet, changing a diaper and before preparing food.

What should I do if I think I've been exposed to hepatitis A virus?

Consult your healthcare provider or health department right away. If you've been exposed, it's important that you receive hepatitis A vaccine within two weeks of

exposure. Some people need immune globulin rather than vaccine. If you do become ill with hepatitis A virus, you will need to get information from your healthcare provider on how to take care of yourself. Your household and sexual contacts might need hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin so they do not get infected.

What is immune globulin?

Immune globulin is a substance made from human blood plasma that contains antibodies that protect against infection. It is given as a shot and provides short-term protection (approximately 3 months) against hepatitis A infection. Immune globulin can be given either before exposure to the hepatitis A virus (before travel to a country where hepatitis A is common) or to prevent infection after exposure to the hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin must be given within two weeks after exposure for the best protection.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Utah Department of Health](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Immunization Action Coalition](#)

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